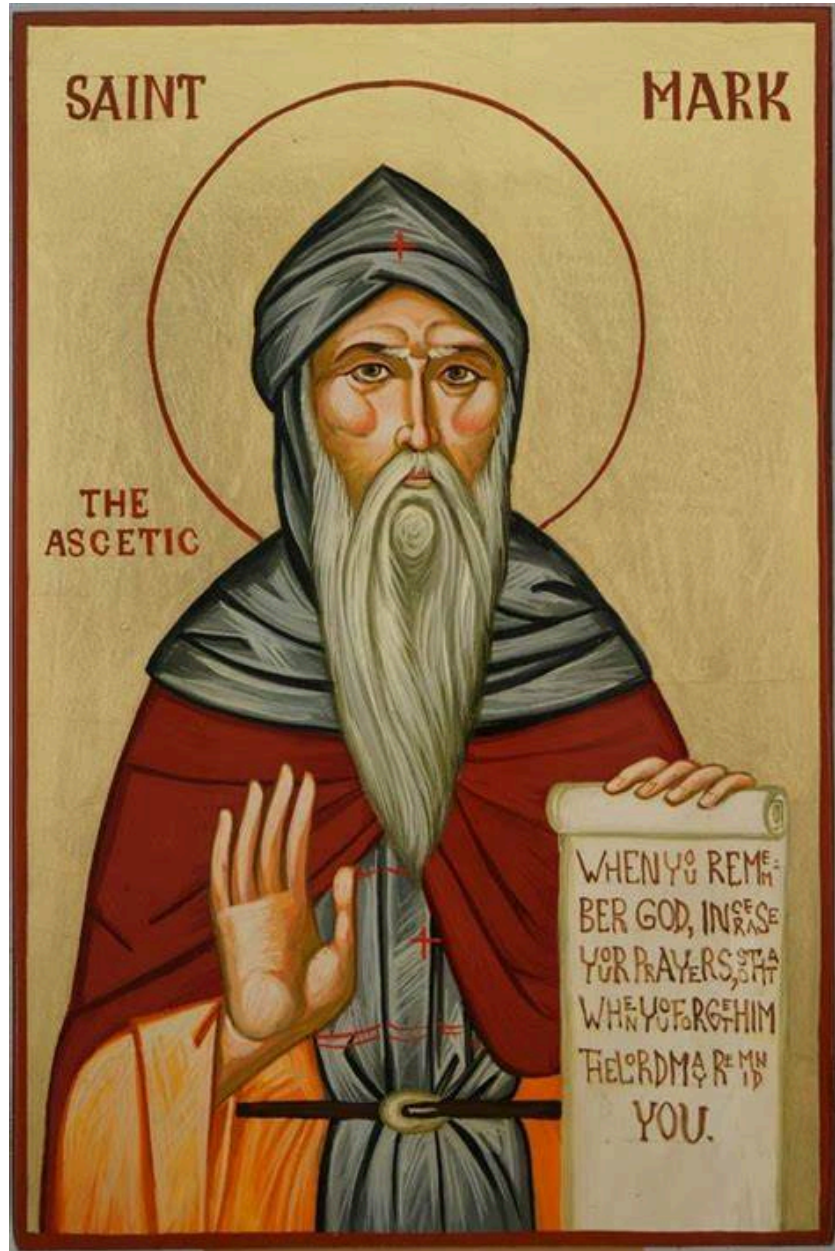


The Spiritual Law

St. Mark the Ascetic



Translated from *Voice of the Fathers* #34
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Prologue

Saint Mark is one of the most eminent ascetic writers of our Church. He lived between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th centuries. He was a disciple of St. John Chrysostom. He was an elder and head of a monastic brotherhood in Ankara before retiring to the desert of Galatia, where he lived alone. He slept as a centenarian after 430.

Saint Mark, a friend of God and a friend of pain, devoted sixty years to learning and studying the Holy Scripture Reaching "the height of ascesis and virtue," as St. Nicodemus characteristically notes in his [Synaxary \(March 5\)](#), he acquired the gifts of miracle-working and spiritual wisdom.

The latter is proven over time by his doctrinal and ascetic writings, which became so popular that the Byzantine Christians came to say: "Always sell and buy Mark"! His testimony, moreover, is often invoked by his later ascetic writers, such as Abba Dorotheos, St. John of Sinai, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, etc.

One of the god-bearing ascetic's small but excellent works is *On the Spiritual Law*, which is contained in the [Philokalia](#) of the holy Neptics. In these 200 aphoristic "chapters," the operation of the spiritual law is analyzed in an original way and with a solid foundation in the Holy Scriptures and the sacred Tradition.

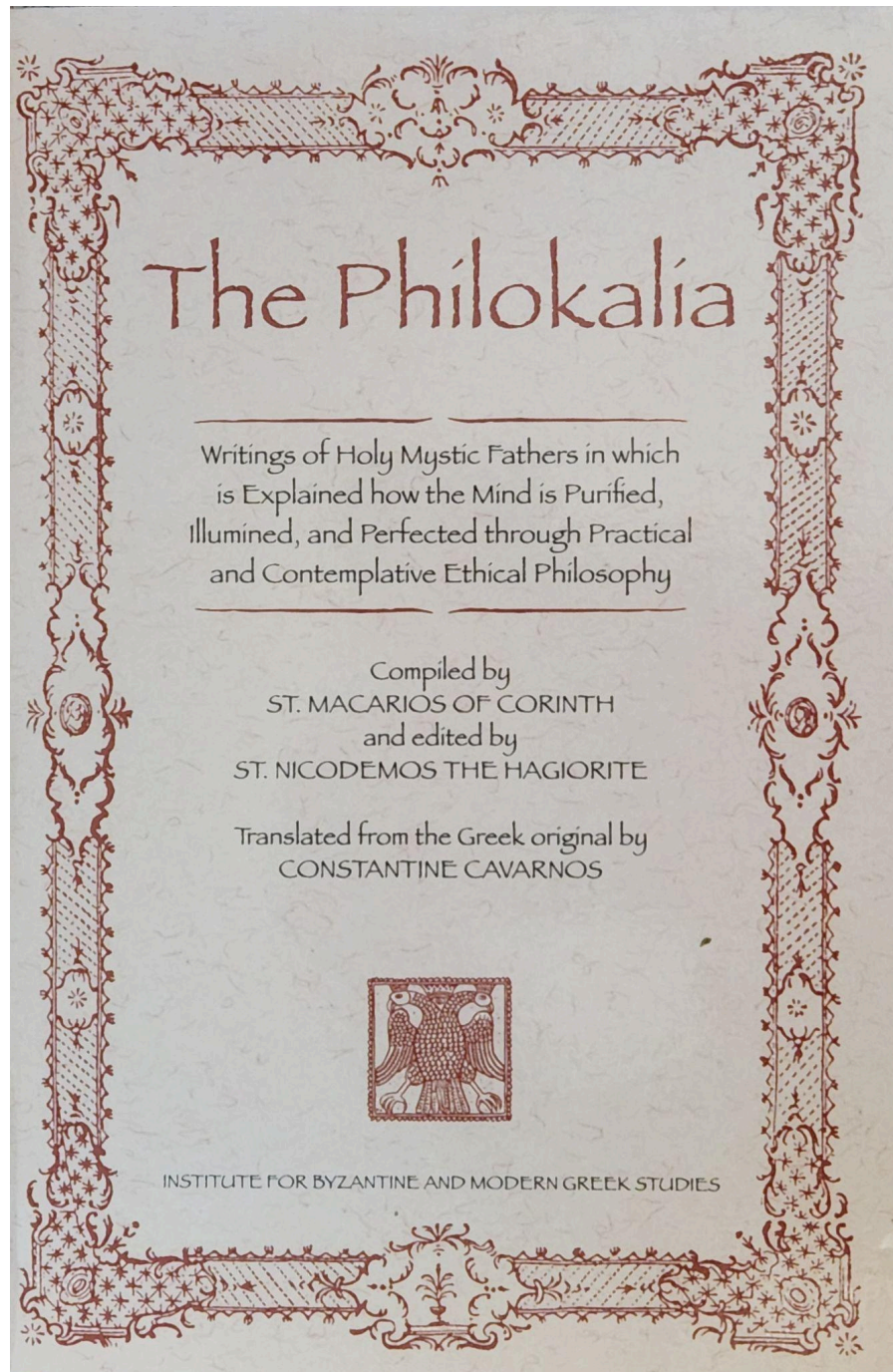
According to the holy author, this law is "the law of freedom," contained in the Gospel of Christ. Observance of the evangelical commandments is the content of Christian practice. It leads believers from the slavery of the passions to the freedom of the children of God and the peace of the Holy Spirit.

It is worth noting that [St. Symeon the New Theologian](#) (949-1022), came to the sight of the uncreated divine light at a very young age. At the suggestion of his spiritual father, he studied St. Mark's text and applied mainly his advice: "If you seek to heal, take care of your conscience and do what it tells you."

Today, when contempt for God's law has led our society to a deep crisis and an inability to distinguish good from evil, the God-wise "chapters" of St. Mark emerge as a valuable guiding rule for life in Christ. The most important of them are anthologized in the following pages, and we believe that they will benefit our brothers and sisters who conscientiously strive to be free "from the law of sin and death" and to live "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (cf. Rom. 8:2).

The following pages explain the most important of these, and we believe that they will benefit our brothers and sisters who consciously strive to be released "from the law of sin and death" and to be subject to "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (cf. Rom. 8:2).

Holy Monastery of the Paraclete



[The Philokalia Volume I](#)

The Spiritual Law

Because you have often wanted to know how God's law is spiritual, according to the apostle (cf. Rom. 7:14), and what those who want to keep it should know and do, I will tell you about it to the best of my ability.



First of all, we know that God is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all good. Good is impossible to do or to believe except through union with Jesus Christ and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.



In all your endeavours, put the One who is the beginning of all good so that what you have decided to do may be done according to God.



Steadfast faith is a strong tower. And Christ becomes everything for the man who believes.



The law of the Gospel, which leads to freedom, teaches the whole truth. Most read it simply to know it, but few understand it according to the performance of the commandments. To read this law requires knowledge; to understand it requires keeping the commandments, but to fulfil it, one needs the mercy of Christ.



Do not ask to see the perfection of the divine law in virtuous people because no one can be found perfect in virtues. Its perfection is hidden in the Cross of Christ.



The Lord is hidden in His commandments and reveals Himself to those who seek Him according to their willingness to carry out those commandments.



When we do violence to ourselves to carry out all of God's commandments, then we will realize that the law of the Lord is perfect and that we apply it with our good works, but no man can keep it perfectly without God's mercies.



When he reads the divine Scriptures, whoever has humility and spiritual work understands everything about himself and not about others.



Study the words of Scripture, fulfilling the divine commandments, and do not indulge in platitudes and theoretical analyses, which bring pride.



He who knows the will of God and does it according to his strength, by small labours avoids great ones.

He who does not willingly prefer voluntary labour for the sake of piety is more severely tried by involuntary labours.



The conscience is a book that we have by nature. He who studies it in practice receives divine help.



If you want to be healed, listen to your conscience and do what it tells you. You will benefit greatly.



The secrets of every human being are known by God and his conscience. From these two, let everyone be corrected.



A good conscience is acquired through prayer, and pure prayer through conscience. Because, by nature, they need each other.



Whoever carries out God's command, let him wait for the temptation that follows it because love for Christ is tested by opposites.



He who wants to overcome temptations without prayer and patience will not drive them away but will become more complicated.



Do not say that you have acquired virtue without sorrow. For virtue that is easily acquired is untested.



Eternal goods are prepared for people who are going through sorrows. Likewise, eternal torments have been prepared for those who pass through life with vanity and pleasure.



Do not think that all sorrow comes to people because of their sins. Some people please God, and yet they have sorrows because the Scriptures, which says that "the wicked will be persecuted" (Ps. 36:28), also says that "all those who want to live godly, according to the will of Jesus Christ, will face persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).



Many people opposed the tribulations in many ways. But no one overcame them without prayer and repentance.



Consider the result of every unintentional affliction, and you will find the erasure of some sin in it.



Every godly sorrow is a true work of godliness. For true love is tested by opposites.



Exchange the sorrows of the present in advance for the good things of the future, and your struggle will never falter through negligence.



The mockeries of men bring sorrow to the heart, but they purify those who endure them.



If you are harmed, mocked, or persecuted by someone, do not think about the present but wait for the future. You will find that this person has become your consul of many good things in the present life and the hereafter.



He who is wronged by men is freed from sins and finds help from God commensurate with the sorrow.



Of those who do wrong openly, the most wicked is the one who wrongs secretly; that is why he is punished the hardest.



He who prays for the people who wrong him strikes the demons with vigour. Whoever opposes the people who wrong him is wounded by demons.



Do not try to solve difficult problems by quarrelling but by the means imposed by the spiritual law, that is, by patience, prayer and the simplicity of hope.



It is better to be fought by men than by demons. He who pleases the Lord has defeated them both.



Beware of the attack of pleasure in times of tribulation. It is readily accepted then because it comforts sorrow.



Sin is a burning fire. So, the more you reduce the material that feeds it, the more it will be extinguished. And the more you add material, the more it will flare up.



Do not leave sin without eradicating it, even if it is very small, so it does not draw you into greater evils.



The devil presents minor sins as insignificant because he cannot otherwise lead us to greater evils.



When you sin secretly, don't try to hide. Because "everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of the Lord" (Heb. 4:13), to whom we will be accountable for our actions.



Believe that the Judgment will be merciless for anyone who sins openly, without repenting, and does not suffer anything until his death.



Just as bitter wormwood benefits the poor by whetting their appetite, it is good for the bad-tempered to suffer calamities by making them repent.



If you examine your own sins and not your neighbour's, the demons will never plunder your nous's spiritual workshop.



Let us assume that there are twelve passions. If you love one of them willingly, it is enough to replenish the other eleven.



Vainglory and the love of pleasure are the causes of every evil. He who has not hated these conquers no passion.



Love of money has been called the root of all evil (see 1 Tim. 6:10). However, it is clearly made up of vainglory and sensuality. These three passions—avarice, vainglory, and love of pleasure—blind the nous.



It is because of these passions that anger, wrath, wars, murders and all other evils have increased so much among men. We must, therefore, hate them as the mothers of evil and the stepmothers of virtues.



Everything starts small and slowly expands and grows.



Evils take strength from each other. In the same way, good things increase with the help of others, advancing the person who participates in them.



When you are at the beginning of evil, don't say, "It will not defeat me," because you have already been defeated as much as you are in evil. The method of wickedness is a complex net, and if he neglects it, the one who gets a little entangled is completely caught up in it.



From the love of pleasure comes negligence, and from negligence comes forgetfulness of good, for God has given us all the knowledge of those things which benefit us.



The sensual heart becomes a prison and a chain for the soul at the time of death, while the heart that loves is a door open to God's mercy.



If you don't want to suffer evil, don't desire to do evil. Inevitably, one thing leads to another. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). So when we willingly sow evil and then unwillingly reap it, we must admire God's righteousness.



Don't desire to hear about other people's wicked deeds, because that's how the unique characteristics of those deeds are impressed upon you.



When you hear evil words with pleasure, be angry with yourself, not the one who said them. For if your hearing is evil, you will burden yourself with evil sounds.



Just as it is not possible for sheep and wolves to graze together, so it is not possible for the one who preys on his neighbour to find mercy.



Just as water and fire cannot coexist, [self] justification and humiliation cannot coexist.



If someone praises you hypocritically, wait for him to accuse you.



If you become proud because you are praised, expect dishonour. For the Bible says, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled" (Luke 14:11).



When you have a thought that urges you to seek human glory, know well that it prepares you for shame.



He who seeks praise is in passion. And he who mourns for sorrow that has come to him loves pleasure.



There is control that is done out of malice or defence. There is also control that is done out of fear of God and out of love for the truth.



It is better to pray reverently for your neighbour than to rebuke him for his every sin.



There are many ways of praying, and they differ from one another. However, no one way of prayer is harmful unless it is not prayer but satanic action/energy.



Do not be proud if you shed tears in your prayer. It is Christ who has touched your eyes and healed the blindness of your nous.



A man who wanted to do evil first prayed noetically out of habit. And since God's economy prevented him from evil, much later, he thanked Him.



Vigil, prayer, and perseverance in sorrows bring a safe and beneficial contrition to the heart, as long as we do not upset the balance of these three by extravagance. He who patiently cultivates these virtues will receive help from others, while he who neglects and disperses here and there will feel unbearable anguish at the time of his death.



Do not think or do anything without a purpose in accordance with God's will. For he who walks without purpose wearies himself in vain.



There is an act that seems good, but the purpose of the one who does it is not good. Another act appears bad, but the purpose of the one who does it is good. This happens not only in works but also in words. This contrast between action and purpose is sometimes due to inexperience or ignorance, sometimes to an evil disposition, and sometimes to a pious purpose.



God evaluates our actions according to our intentions. Because the Bible says, "May the Lord give you according to your heart" (Ps. 19:5).



There is a man who seemingly does God's commandment but is a slave to passion and, by his evil thoughts, destroys the good deed.



Never despise or neglect your thoughts. For God knows every thought infallibly.



God judges and weighs our every thought. One can think about the same thing either simply or in an impassioned way.



Hearing the Lord say, "Whoever does not renounce all his possessions is not worthy to be my disciple" (cf. Luke 14:33), do not think he is referring only to money but also to all acts of wickedness.



He who repents properly is mocked by foolish men. And this is a sign that he pleases God.



Ἡ ἀμέλεια στό νά κάνουμε ὅσα καλά μποροῦμε, δύσκολα συγχωρεῖται. Ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη, ὅμως, καί ἡ προσευχή ἀποκαθιστοῦν ἐκείνους πού ἀμέλησαν νά κάνουν τό καλό.



Τίς ἐναλλαγές τῶν καλῶν καί τῶν κακῶν νά τίς δέχεσαι μέ ἡρεμία. Ἐτσι ἐξομαλύνει ὁ Θεός τίς ἀνωμαλίες τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων.



Don't say that temptation comes without you wanting it. For indeed, even if you do not love the sinful act, you love its causes.



Pray that you will not be tempted. But if it comes, accept it as your own, not as a stranger.



If you want to be saved, love the true word and never indiscriminately turn to others.



The mouth of the humble-minded man speaks the truth. The one who contradicts the truth is like the servant who slapped the Lord in the face.



It is one thing to perform a commandment and another to perform virtue, though they take from each other the causes of the good. To do what is commanded by the divine law is to perform a commandment. But virtue is genuinely enjoying the performance of the holy commandment.



As the light of day comes from the sun, so every virtue comes from God.



When you have attained some virtue, remember Christ, who said, "Without me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).



All good has been bestowed by the Lord on men according to dispensation, and he who believes in this way will never lose it.



For the shame that one will gladly bear for the truth of Christ, a hundred times more will be glorified by many people. But it is better to do every good thing only for the future good.



The one who has a spiritual gift and compassion for those who do not have it preserves the gift through compassion. The arrogant, however, will lose it, as his arrogant thoughts will beat him.



The heart that has mercy for others will undoubtedly be pardoned. The opposite is also evident.



Peace is freedom from passions, which is not found without the action of the Holy Spirit.



Always do good according to your strength. And when you can do the greater, do not be content with the lesser. For the Bible says, "He who turns back is not fit for the kingdom of heaven" (cf. Luke 9:62).



ΔΙΑΝΕΜΕΤΑΙ ΔΩΡΕΑΝ

